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ABSTRACT

A study investigating whether and how non-native speakers of English (NNS) make efforts to repair communication breakdowns with other NNS used data gathered from 59 verbal interactions by 26 students. The students were grouped by proficiency level (low, medium, and high) before the analysis of the interactions took place. Each instance of breakdown was classified according to the speaker's strategies to re-establish communication. Nonlinguistic and group repair types of strategies are considered as well as other strategies: word-for-word or nearly word-for-word repetition, appeal to the written language (spelling, writing down or pointing to a word in question), clarification by repeating only the final segment of the original utterance, restatement in a different form, returning contractions and abbreviations to their full form, paraphrasing, defining, providing contrast, providing examples, providing contextual information, and gesturing. The results of the analysis indicate that NNS do negotiate understanding with each other through a variety of strategies, typically following a two-tiered approach: (1) first checking to confirm that both speaker and listener agree about what has been said; and (2) if that is not sufficient to re-establish communication, clarifying meaning by a variety of mechanisms. In addition, when communication breaks down in a group, the group can attempt repair without waiting for the original speaker to repair the communication himself. (MSE)

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Processes of Repair in Non-Native-Speaker Conversation

It is not uncommon in an ESL classroom for a teacher to be faced with a room full of students who tell her most emphatically that they can't learn to speak English by speaking with each other, but must learn by speaking "real English" with native speakers. One of their reasons is that they can't understand what their classmates are saying.

That native speakers do modify their speech to help make the target language understandable to the non-native-speaker (NNS) has been well documented (Ferguson 1971, Freed 1978, Long 1983, Hatch 1983 among many others). The question this paper addresses is if and how non native speakers make their language comprehensible to each other; that is, how they negotiate understanding with each other in cases where communication has broken down.

In order to investigate this question, instances of communication breakdown between NNS's were collected, and the processes used by the NNS's to repair the breakdown were observed. An example of communication breakdown is Example (1) below. This example took place when the students were trying to decide who was going to critique "posture" and who was going to critique "body movement" during an upcoming presentation by another one of the students.

(1) Li-Mei: "Posture" and "body": you can choose one.
Carlos: Fine. (Doesn't choose)

(PAUSE)

Li-Mei: Which one you like: "posture" or "body"?
Carlos: Oh, I'll take "body".

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In this example, Li-Mei has asked Carlos to choose one of the areas to critique. He misunderstands her, says "fine", but doesn't choose one. After a pause, Li-Mei realizes that Carlos didn't understand her, and rephrased her utterance into a question, "Which one you like: posture or body?" Carlos then understands and chooses "body". This situation has the following characteristics:

1. Communication has broken down between speakers; that is, the speakers have reached a point where they don't understand each other.

2. At least one of the speakers recognizes that communication has broken down and initiates a negotiation process to re-establish communication(called repair).

3. Communication is recognized as having been re-established between the speakers.

The notion of "repair" has been used in the literature to describe basically two different kinds of phenomena: the first, repair of speech errors and speech disfluencies, and the second, the sense that will be used here, repair of a breakdown in communication between speakers.

The present study describes instances of communication breakdown and repair which were observed in talk among non-native speakers at the English Program for Foreign Students at the University of Pennsylvania. The students at this program are for the most part well educated and highly literate in their own languages and are headed for academic and professional programs in the U.S. They come

from a variety of countries, including Korea, Japan, Peru ,Italy, Venezuela and Afghanistan.

There were a total of 59 instances of communication breakdown that were observed and collected in this study. 86% of the data occurred in the classroom in the course of a wide variety of activities, such as discussions, group decision-making activities, question and answer periods following presentations, and work on homework assignments. 14% of the data was collected outside the classroom during the course of student conversations in the lounge.

There were a total of 26 students represented in the sample. In the analysis, these students were grouped into three groups according to proficiency: low, mid and high (with a range of approximately Intermediate Mid to Advanced Plus on the ACTFL rating scale). The data were analyzed for differences by proficiency but no significant differences emerged in the range represented by this sample.

The examples were either recorded on tape and later transcribed, or they were immediately recorded by hand when they occurred in a situation which was not being taped. Standard English spelling was used to record the data except in places where a mispronounced word was the cause of miscommunication.

Each instance of communication breakdown was classified according to the strategies used by the speaker to reestablish communication. If more than one strategy was attempted, all the strategies were recorded. For example, #2:

(2)
Tatsuro: He was dere when-
So Yeop: Dere? was dere?
Tatsuro: In the United States
So Yeop: Dere?
Tatsuro: Dere! (SPELLS) T-H-E-R-E
So Yeop: Oh! There!

In this example, Tatsuro tries three different strategies: 1. replacing the deictic there with an explicit referent "The United States"; 2. repetition, "dere" ; and 3. spelling. Therefore this one instance of breakdown was classified as having three strategies of attempted repair. In the data, the 59 instances of breakdown were accompanied by 107 different attempted and successful repairs.

While the majority of the cases of breakdown were ultimately repaired, there were instances where they were not, as in the following example, #3:

(3) (The students are asking Satomi questions after her presentation on the Japanese tea ceremony)
Kwon: At tea ceremony, can I drink before the leader of the tea ceremony?
Satomi: You drink?
Kwon: Yes, before the leader
Satomi: Ah, the leader. At ceremony, the seat nearest the door is the lowest position. If there are several guests, they sit according to the order. The first position is the leader. The toppest position-
Bepi: How can I be the leader?

(general laughter)

In this example, Satomi did not understand the question Kwon was asking, heard "leader" and went on to talk about the leader's position. Kwon was never given a further chance to clarify his question beceuse Bepi's question moved the conversation on. While there were instances of

non-repair such as this, in 90% of the instances collected in this study, repair of the breakdown was successful.

The Role of Non-Linguistic Information

Linguistic means are not the only resources a listener has to provide information to the speaker about whether the message has been received. The listener can use facial cues, body movement and non-verbal vocalizations- the "back channel cues" (Goffman 1978)-to give ongoing information to the speaker about whether he/she understands what the speaker is saying. In the data here, the listener frequently uses the back channel cues to signal that he/she is not following the speaker. This leads the speaker to seek repair, as in Example#4 below:

(4)(In the process of a discussion about Princess Diana)

Ram: She is pregant.
Soraia: (looks at him steadily, says nothing and makes no sign of understanding)
Ram: She is pregnant now.
Soraia: I know. I saw her last night(on t.v.)

In the example below, it is actually the absence of the back channel cues (such as a nod of the head) that leads the speaker to seek repair.

Group Repair

Many of the studies that have been done to date on input and interaction have focussed on the dyad as the primary communicative unit. Yet conversations outside the classroom often take place in groups of three or more, as do many activities inside the classroom. There were many instances in this data where communication broke down between a speaker and one or more members of a larger group. An example of this is the following (Example #5) which occurred in the middle of a discussion on standardized tests:

(#5) Keenam: A lot of people um-a lot of people expect some kind of luck
Young Jin: O.K., but-
Bepi: Some kind of what?
Keenam: Luck..luck..luck
Young Jin: Yeah, luck
Satomi (Spells) L-U-C-K
Bepi (nods head)
Keenam: So test are supposed to be- the test may only measure learning is. We should not expect the luck by test.

In this example, Keenam is talking to a group of her classmates about standardized tests; Bepi does not understand "luck" and asks about it at the same time that Young Jin starts to add his own point. At that point the speaker (Keenam) and Young Jin both clarify the word for Bepi by repeating it and Satomi immediately starts spelling it. Bepi shows that he understands and Keenam continues her point.

The term "group repair" will be used in this paper to refer to this repair process. Group repair is characterized by the following steps:

1. A breakdown in communication occurs between two or more members of a larger group (as with Bepi, above)

2. The other members of the group who perceive the breakdown contribute to the repair, without necessarily waiting for the original speaker to initiate repair. This is contrary to the model

proposed by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) which showed conversation to be almost invariably organized to allow the speaker to repair his or her own speech. In fact, in the case of group repair, sometimes repair occurs without the original speaker even being aware that there has been any breakdown at all, or what might be causing the trouble, as in the following example (#6):

(6)(So Yeop is giving a lecture on chemical bonds)

SoYeop: There are a lot of bonds
Yoneida: A lot of what?

At this point, Keenam, who understood what So Yeop had said, answers:

Keenam: (SLOWLY) a/lot/of/bonds
Yoneida (nods head)

At this point, So Yeop, who had paused briefly for the interaction between Keenam and Yoneida, continued with her talk, without ever being aware of the source or the repair of the miscommunication.

3. A third consistent characteristic of group repair is that once the breakdown in communication has been repaired, the right to speak in the group goes back to the original speaker, no matter who was involved in the clarification process.

In the following example, Tatsuo and three group members immediately try to clarify the misunderstood word; when Eli

shows that he understands, Tatsuo continues with control of the floor (#7)

(7) (Tatsuo is introducing his topic of discussion to the group):
Tatsuo: um I though the topics for this class at a very short time yesterday morning. And I wrote down nine topics, and almost about foods.
(Laughter from the group)
Eli: About what?
Tatsuo: Food
Eli: foos?
So Yeop: fud.....fud!
Tatsuo: (SPELLS) F-O-O-D-S- foods
Jang: food
Keenam: food
Eli (NODS HEAD)
Tatsuo: And first of these a breakfast, and second is lunch and third dinn

The next example, Example 8, occurred in the middle of a group discussion about divorce:

(8)
Bepi: How do you feel about divorce?
Satomi: Huh?
Bepi: (Louder and more slowly) How/do/you/feel/about/divorce?
(PAUSE)
Yoneida: What is your opinion about divorce?
Satomi: What is my opinion about divorce?
Bepi: Yeah
Satomi (Proceeds to answer)

Note that here Bepi is asking a question which Satomi doesn't understand. Yoneida rephrases the question. Satomi checks her understandin and Bepi confirms that this is what he was asking. Example 8 differs from Number 7 in that here the original speaker, Bepi, does not continue with the floor, because he has asked a question, which transfers to right to speak to the person answering the question (once the question has been clarified and understood). But, as the original speaker, Bepi retains the right to comment on whether the question has been clarified properly, as with his "yeah" here.

In this data, instances of group repair are approximately 20% of the total data. In short, group repair is a communication resource for speakers who are members of a larger group, and instances of group repair are remarkably consistent and rule governed.

In this data, speakers use a variety of strategies in attempting to repair communication breakdown: one type is strategies which attempt to clarify the form of the original utterance. (While the term "tactic" is sometimes preferred to distinguish on-the-spot repairs from longer-range planning, the term "strategy" is preferred here in its more general sense of a method of operation that the L2 speaker uses to help the process of communication.)

The Strategies

Repetition, either word-for-word, or nearly word-for-word, was usually the strategy tried first by the L2 speakers in this study. An example of this is the following, #9:

(9) (Nicholas is giving a talk about different musical styles)

Nicholas: There's that kind of music played in disco places
Daizo: Difficult what?
Nicholas: That kind of music played in disco places

Repetition is often accompanied by slow and distinct pronunciation. In addition, the breakdown may prompt the speaker to do conscious monitoring of his or her pronunciationfor possible errors, as in the next example, #10.

(10) (In small groups telling what they did over the weekend)

Tatsuo: And also I led some books
Yoneida: (writing down) Led?
Tatsuo:(pursing lips to do "r") read, read
Yoneida(no response, looking at word she wrote down)
Tatsuo (pointing to paper and spelling) R-E-A-D,R-E-A-D;
(going through principle parts of the verb:) read,
read,read; read, read, read
Yoneida:(changes word on paper with Tatsuo leaning over
to watch her)

Repetition is such a common strategy that its role in communication may be overlooked. Yet it may be one of the most effective strategies for promoting comprehension that a speaker can use. The use of repetition by native speakers in speaking to less proficient speakers has been well attested in both foreigner talk and caretaker speech. Recent controlled studies (Cervantes 1983, Chaudron 1983) on the relationship of repetition and non redundancy in improving listening comprehension have documented its value as well.

Appeal to the written language

Another strategy that was used was an appeal to the written language as a resource in repairing breakdown in the spoken language. In this data, this included spelling aloud the word in question , writing down the word, and showing the word in a book to the listener. In the following example (11), Kwon says an utterance including the mispronounced word "regend".So Yeop cannot understand the word that he says and questions it. Kwon then spells the word for her without a try at repeating it again.

(11) Kwon : There is an old regend that says-
So Yeop: Regend?
Kwon: (Spells) L-E-G-E-N-D
So Yeop:(Spells) L-E-G-E-N-D, legend!

In another example, Example 12, Yoneida is trying to introduce the subject of cancer into the conversation. Her classmates do not understand her, and after three of them repeat the word several times without understanding, Yoneida writes down the word and gives it to them to see:

(12) Yoneida: You know cahncer?
Sor Moi: cahncer? cahncer?
Satomi: cancer? cahncer?
Young Jin: cahncer?
Yoneida: (writes down the word and gives it to them)
Satomi: Oh! cancer!
Yoneida: cancer.

In Example 13, Soraia was doing her homework in the lounge. She asked Ram, a more advanced student sitting at the same table, "What's the past participle of "won"?" Ram said "won"? and looked confused. She pointed her finger to the place in the book where the word was written and showed him the book. Ram looked at the book where she was pointing and said "win", "won". Soraia started to write in the book.

The strategy of appealing to the written language was used by seven different speakers in the data and shows that for highly literate L2 learners (as this group is), the written language can be a significant resource for promoting spoken communication between speakers.

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Clarification of Utterance-Final Segment Only

In a number of cases where communication has broken down, the speaker initiates repair by repeating a word or phrase from the end of the original utterance only. This may happen even though the listener has not specifically pointed out that the trouble is with the end of the original utterance.

In the example below (#14), Satomi is talking about the Japanese tea ceremony:

(14)
Satomi: The green tea is very very bitter
Bepi: Pardon?
Satomi: Bitter
Keenam: Bitter
Bepi: uh
Satomi: So you have to eat very sweet cake first

Although Bepi's "Pardon?" questions the entire original utterance, Satomi and Keenam only respond with "bitter".

Similarly, in this data speakers sometimes spelled a word from the utterance-final position to initiate repair, even though the listener had questioned the speaker's entire utterance, as in #15:

(15) (Tatsuro is answering the question "If you could be in any profession, what would you be?")

Tatsuro: If I could change my profession, I would be a beggar
Jang (Writing on paper, makes no response to Tatsuro)
Tatsuro: If I could change my profession, I would be a //bEg/gar
Jang: (looks up)
Tatsuro: (SPELLS) B-E-G-G-A-R
Jang: Beaker, beaker, what do you mean?
Tatsuro: Beggar, beggar, who stands on the street. You give your change
Jang Oh oh Oh

In this example, although Jang has not specifically questioned the end of Tatsuro's sentence, his looking up has prompted Tatsuro to clarify only the word "beggar" by spelling it.

There are no examples in the data of the utterance initial segment only being repeated or spelled when the whole utterance has been questioned.

One possible explanation for this lies in a theory about the way information is organized in English sentences. Halliday (1967) among others has noted that typically, in English, what is given information in a sentence will precede what is new information in the discourse. Thus the utterance-initial segment will typically contain given information and the utterance final segment will typically contain new information. Although there have been many definitions of given and new information in the literature (Prince 1981) , we can here use the sense of given information as information which the listener could recover from the situation or preceding text, and new information as information not recoverable from the preceding text (Halliday and Hasan 1976, Halliday 1967).

Information that can be recoverable from what has gone before must have already been understood by the speakers. Thus if communication breaks down, it could only be the segment containing the new information which is causing the problem.

In example 14, Satomi has already been talking about the green tea; the only new information is that the tea is "very bitter". Thus when Bepi questions the whole utterance, it is only "bitter" which could be confusing him. Similarly, in example 15, "beggar" is the only new information in the utterance. If this explanation is right, it would show L2 speakers at these proficiency levels to be quite sensitive to the information organization of English.

In the examples presented up to now, the speakers have attempted to repair communication breakdown by clarifying the form of their original utterances, using repetition, spelling, monitoring for pronunciation, etc.

Goffman (1978) claims that a fundamental assumption of conversation is that the hearer and the speaker must be able to agree on what the utterance was that the speaker said. As Goffman puts it, the issue is not that the recipients (the listeners) should agree with what they have heard, but only agree with the speaker as to what they have heard. (261)

The use of the first strategies to clarify the original utterance and allow the speaker and hearer to agree on what was said is thus in line with Goffman's fundamental assumption of conversation.

Repair by Restating the Utterance in a Different Form

The next examples are situations where speakers try to repair communication breakdown by restating their message in a different form. The first strategy of this type is modification of the syntactic or morphological form. In Example 16, Uchida has just made a presentation about hieroglyphics and is answering questions:

(16)
Adel: I'd just like to know how the scientists knew, how they managed-
Uchida: hm?
Adel: How they did manage to know the meaning
Uchida: You mean how theyknew the pronunciation?
Adel: No no no, take for example the house. How did they know what they meant?
Uchida (Proceeds to give answer)

In this example, Adel has asked Uchida a question that Uchida doesn't understand. Uchida says "hm?" and Adel repeats his question, this time explicitly marking the auxiliary, presumably to make the question

format (although possibly the past tense) clearer.

An example of clarification through change in the morphological form is given in Example 17. Here Tatsuo and Satomi change "need" to the correct form "necessary" to clarify the utterance.

(17) (In a group discussion about whether junior high school kids should get kicked out of school when they do something wrong.)

Young Jin: I think it's need
So Yeop: It's need?
Tatsuo: Necessary
Satomi: Necessary
Young Jin: Yeah
So Yeop: Oh

Explicitness

Explicitness is another strategy where speakers change the form of their utterance by making contractions and abbreviations more explicit by returning to their full form if the original utterance was not understood. In Example 18, Keenam is trying to rouse a group discussion on the unfairness of standardized tests. The other students have let the discussion die:

Keenam: Maybe the students in here, they are all good students, they never had a problem except me (laughs). Always I can't satisfied my test score.
Satomi: You can?
Keenam: No, always
Bepi: You can't?
Keenam: I cannot. I'm not a test wiseness. I don't have ability.

Here Satomi is the first one to question whether Keenam had said can or can't. Keenam's answer does not clarify the situation and Bepi asks again. At this point, Keenam uses the full form cannot.

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In Example 19, Bepi returns to the full form United States after communication difficulty has been encountered:

(19) The students are in the middle of a full class discussion about nuclear weapons

Bepi:...that (yus)S.A. has a lot-
Anastasia: yus S.A.?
Bepi: Yus S.A...United States has a lot of weapons
Anastasia (nods head)

Example 19 is also an example of a phenomenon which occurred a number of times in this data but which has been reported to be extremely rare in the conversations of first language speakers; that is, a listener interrupting a speaker in the middle of a turn to repair communication breakdown. According to Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977), listeners almost invariably wait to initiate repair until the speaker has finished his/her turn. In contrast, second language speakers interrupt each other with some frequency (cf. Examples 2,11,16).

Among the possible explanations for the frequency of the interruptions in this data is that the L2 speakers in this sample have not learned the sociolinguistic rules for discourse repair that native speakers use. Another possible explanation is that L1 speakers can cope with an incomprehensible segment of speech better than an L2 speaker can, in effect holding a place for the incomprehensible piece of speech and using the rest of the utterance to figure out the meaning of the incomprehensible segment.

The interruptions in the middle of the speaker's turn, on the other hand, show L2 speakers trying to clarify an unclear speech segment as soon as it occurs, not using the rest of the speaker's utterance to help themselves figure out the meaning.

There is a third group of strategies where speakers try to repair communication breakdown by clarifying the meaning of their utterance through a variety of devices, including paraphrase and definitions, use of examples, and gesture, among others.

The use of these strategies usually follows the use of Type I strategies. In other words (except in the cases of group repair), speakers usually follow a two-tiered approach of first checking to see if the breakdown was caused only because the message form had not been received, in which case repetition or spelling etc. would repair the breakdown, and if the problem is not solved by clarifying the message form, the speaker may move to clarification of the meaning of the utterance thorugh the strategies in this section.

Group III Strategies: Paraphrase, Definition, Contrast, Examples, and Context Information

An example of the use of paraphrase in clarifying the meaning of an utterance is the following example, Example 20, that occurred during a group discussion about compulsory education in Peru, Eli's native country:

(20)
So Yeop (to Eli): From elementary to high school is compulsory?
Eli: (Looks at So Yeop) PAUSE
Satomi (to Eli) Everyone has to go to high school?
Eli: Yes

Here Eli did not respond to So Yeop's question, so Satomi rephrased the question for him,changing "compulsory" to "has to go".

The next example, Example 21, is a good example of an explicit definition of a phrase:

(21) (The students are in small groups answering questions on a listening comprehension passage; the question is "What's ironic about the credit system?"

Keenam: You have to owe money to borrow money
Gerardo: What?
Keenam: You have to owe money to borrow money
Gerardo: Owe money?
Keenam: It means, you know, to have a debt. (Louder and more slowly) You/have/to/owe/money/to/borrow/money
Gerardo : (Nods head and writes answer in book)

Note that Example 21 is also a good example of the two tiered approach to repair. Since it is not clear from Gerardo's question whether he hasn't heard Keenam clearly or doesn't understand the meaning of her words. Keenam first repeats her utterance exactly. When Gerardo still questions her, she apparently decides that it is not the linguistic form of the utterance that is in question but the meaning of the utterance. She then explains the meaning of the phrase "to owe money", which repairs the breakdown.

Contrast was also used to clarify meaning. An example of the use of contrast is #22, which occurred in a discussion about the way computers are used in society:

(22) Yoneida: It's fine in this use
Satomi: Sorry?
Yoneida: It's fine in this use. In other things it's not o.k.
Satomi: Why?

In this study, specific examples were frequently used to communicate a more general or abstract concept. The following is an example of this by Patricia, who is the lowest proficiency speaker of the sample. In this example, the students are in the middle of a

discussion about the value of television, and Patricia has just made the point that young children shouldn't be allowed to watch t.v. Then she says

(23) Patricia: I think t.v. is good but it's very dangerous
Monica: very?
Patricia: dangerous. It's it's the war.
Monica: O.K. I understand.

When Monica questions the utterance by saying "very?" , Patricia repeats "dangerous" and then tries to communicate the meaning of "dangerous" by giving an example of a dangerous situation, war.

Another way of clarifying the meaning of an utterance was through the use of context information, in particular, sequentially-related information. In Example 24, the students are trying to rank order possible candidates for a heart transplant in a group decision-making activity.

(24) Eli: Who do you think should be the third one?
Bepi: Pardon?
Eli: The third one. We have the first one, the second one. What's
Bepi: (Nods head, looks at paper)

In this example, to clarify "third", Eli places it in the sequence of "first second, third."

In this study, the frequent use of paraphrase, contrast, specific examples, and the use of sequentially-related context information shows the importance of these particular information types in the clarification of information.

In addition to using these and other strategies to clarify the meaning of an utterance, speakers who share another language besides English may resort to that language if breakdown occurs in English. While there is only one example of this in the data, it has been well-documented as a phenomenon in the large body of research on code-switching. Example 26 was collected outside the classroom in the lounge, and is an example of the kinds of differences that might arise between strategies that are used in the classroom where the teacher can set rules such as "only English" and strategies that are used outside the classroom.

(26) Mustafa: I was having-
Anastasia: You were what?
Mustafa: javais...(continues in French)

Gesture

Finally, a very common means to help establish the meaning of an utterance was the use of gesture. Gestures were never used by themselves, but always in connection with one or more of the strategies listed

above. In the following example (#27), Tatsuo is explaining why he eats at irregular hours (in a full group discussion about food habits):

(27) Tatsuo: And uh so I have to-now I have to make clothes during every night and-
So Yeop: Make clo-?
Tatsuo: Make clothes (mimes sketching) I'm fashion designer
So Yeop: Ah you're a designer
Tatsuo: Yeah..
So Yeop: ooh

Here Tatsuo uses gesture along with some context information to communicate his idea.

The examples presented here show that non-native speakers do negotiate understanding with each other through a variety of strategies, typically following a two-tiered approach of 1) first checking to confirm that both the speaker and the hearer are in agreement about what was said. To do this they use strategies such as repetition, spelling, writing down the word, etc. They may have to repeat this step more than once. 2) If Step 1 is not sufficient to re-establish communication, speakers may try to clarify the meaning of the original utterance through a variety of mechanisms such as the use of definitions, paraphrase, return to the L1 or other common language, gesture, etc. In addition, 3) when communication breaks down between people who are members of a larger group, the other group members do not have to wait for the original speakers to repair the breakdown but can themselves effect repair. Examples of group repair show evidence of being systematic, rule-governed behavior.

Finally, I would like to discuss briefly the conditions that seem to encourage students' negotiation with each other.

In my observation, these instances of negotiation were more likely to occur in situations where students have control over their own turn taking (i.e., control over who will talk next (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974). The actual nature of the activity itself, whether it was a group decision-making activity, a discussion, or a conversation, seemed to be less important than the fact of student control of the turn-taking itself.

The next example, number 28, is an example of how these negotiations are related to control of the turn-taking. Here the teacher, who was controlling the turn-taking mechanism, took the floor to answer Soraia's question without realizing that Pamela was trying to make a clarification:

(28)

Levy: Yesterday I thought it..was going to rain
Teacher: fine
Pamela (from across the room to Levy) I? was?
Soraia (to teacher, looking at paper): But why you write "yesterday" first?
Teacher(responding to Soraia, not realizing that Pamela hadn't understood Levy and was trying to clarify his utterance, turns to blackboard and gives explanation)
Pamela: (stops trying to clarify Levi's utterance, leans back, listens to explanation)

I have also observed that, since teachers often rephrase and clarify their students' utterances (as in Example 29), students tend to rely on the teacher to do the clarification work if the teacher is available. This leads to a paradoxical situation where teachers who want their students to learn to negotiate comprehension with

each other find that their own presence may inhibit it.

(29) Pamela: Politics are different from boss
Jedgee (leans forward, looks puzzled)
Teacher: You think politics are different from work?
Jedgee (nods and leans back)

In conclusion, this study has described a variety of ways in which non-native speakers negotiate communication. Many of the strategies that have been documented here, such as repetition, slow and distinct pronunciation, explicitness of form, syntactic modification, the use of examples and definitions, and gesture, are also among those strategies and speech modifications that have been documented in conversations between native speakers and non-native speakers, suggesting the value of NNS speech as well as NS speech in providing input to the L2 learner. While it is true that ESL teachers are likely to continue to hear complaints from students about the impossibilities of learning English by speaking to other L2 speakers, this study has attempted to show that the case of "I don't understand them and they don't understand me" does not typically result in two or more students staring stony-faced at each other. Students naturally and spontaneously initiate processes of repair in such cases, and are highly effective, even as L2 speakers of limited proficiency, at rebuilding the communication lines which had broken in their talk.

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